

Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal,
Mail, Baggage and Express Building
(Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal, Utility
Building) (Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal,
Railway Express Agency Building)
800 North Alameda Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-2158-B

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES UNION PASSENGER TERMINAL,
MAIL, BAGGAGE AND EXPRESS BUILDING HABS No. CA 2158 B
(Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal, Utility Building)
(Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal, Railway Express Agency Building)

Location: 800 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, California, 90012

Present Owner: Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal Corporation

Present Use: Railroad station service building

Significance: The utilitarian Mail, Baggage, and Express Building served as a part of the overall services associated with the architecturally and historically significant Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Built circa 1939, the Mail, Baggage and Express Building is a two- and three-story structure situated perpendicularly to the main Terminal Building, extending along the entire length of the platforms. It acts as a bridge between the platforms and the Terminal Building for the purpose of transferring baggage and, in the past, packages and mail.

Beginning in 1939, the south end of the Mail, Baggage and Express Building (the two story section) housed the Regional Offices of the Railway Express Agency Company, and indeed remains known as the R.E.A. Building. At that time, freight motors of the Pacific Electric Railway provided package and less-than-carload freight interchange service from a small yard located between the south vehicular ramp and the west facade of the Mail, Baggage and Express Building. Packages were transferred from Pacific Electric motors to waiting trains via handling areas within the building. This practice ended in 1951 when trucks replaced the Pacific Electric rail service. In 1953 a maintenance building (now utilized as a parking structure) topped by a covered loading dock was constructed in the former Pacific Electric interchange yard area. The truck service, a function of the R.E.A., continued in operation until 1969.

Prior to 1969, when the level of train service in operation was considerably reduced, the north (three story) end of this building was the hub of Los Angeles passenger operation activities for the following railroads: Southern Pacific Transportation Company, Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe Railway Company, and the Union Pacific Railroad.

The first floor or street level housed the locker rooms for trainmen, brakemen, engineers, firemen, and car porters. Rooms for car hackers and the Santa Fe News were also on the first floor.

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The second floor or track level had two sections. Section I housed the Yard Master's office and preferential mail handling. Section II housed second, third and fourth class mail handling.

The third floor of this structure was the Communications Center. Telephone and telegraph operators occupied the third floor and a Lamson Tubes System connected this nerve center with the rest of the station. The third floor also had a Pullman Company office with an accountant on duty 24 hours a day to take deposits from Pullman conductors, a locker room for the conductors, and a jail to house prisoners in transit. After 1969, the Office of the Station Superintendent was moved to the third floor. The remainder of the north end is vacant.

Plans are now underway for substantial changes to these buildings due to the construction of the Los Angeles Metro Rail Project, which would have its starting point at a subway station at the terminal, and the extension of the 11-mile El Monte Busway. The buildings are considered to be in fair to poor condition. Supported in part by a grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, the Metro Rail is an 18.6 mile rapid transit line designed and located to serve the core of the Southern California region. The construction of the subway station would involve the removal in stages and replacement of rail track, the north end of the Mail, Baggage and Express Building, and part of the ramp at the north end of the property. The first floor or street level of the building will be rebuilt and the ramp will be reconstructed in its entirety.

The El Monte Busway would be extended by 3/4 mile from its current westerly terminus at Mission Road to Alameda Street at the terminal. The Busway extension is designed to increase transit use, improve air quality, and reduce energy consumption. The typical cross section of the facility will be a 54-foot wide elevated structure with a median barrier separation.

Construction will effect the Los Angeles Passenger Terminal in the following ways. The extension will run through a portion of the grounds, and portions of existing landscaping will be removed. Part of a pedestrian walkway and lighting pylons will be taken out. Part of the south end of the Mail, Baggage and Express Building will be removed. Several tracks and sheds will be shortened. The south vehicular ramp will be modified.

Plans to mitigate these effects are detailed in a Memorandum of Agreement dated May 20, 1981.

SOURCE

Interview with R.L. Pfister, Superintendent, Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal.

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